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ACTION NEA-10

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CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05

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AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMCONSUL LENINGRAD
AMCONSUL MADRAS
USLO PEKING
CINCPAC
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
AMCONSUL LAHORE
AMCONSUL KARACHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 8829

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SUBJ: POST-EMERGENCY INDIA: REACTION OF A SOVIET OFFICIAL

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SUMMARY: A SOVIET EMBASSY OFFICIAL TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER JULY 2 THAT THE DECLARATION OF EMERGENCY WAS IN INDIA'S OWN INTERESTS. WHILE CONCEDING THAT MRS. GANDHI HAD MADE SOME MISTAKES AND EXPRESSING RESERVATIONS ABOUT HER NEW ECONOMIC PROGRAM, THE OFFICIAL FELT THAT SHE REMAINED THE "OPTIMAL" LEADER CONSIDERING ALL CIRCUMSTANCES. THE SOVIET OFFICIAL SAID THAT THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP HAD NOT TO HIS KNOWLEDGE SENT A MESSAGE OF SUPPORT TO THE PRIME MINISTER. END SUMMARY.

1. A SOVIET EMBASSY POLITICAL COUNSELOR DISCUSSED INDIA'S POLITICAL CRISIS AT A LUNCHEON WITH AN EMBASSY OFFICER JULY 2. WHILE AGREEING THERE WAS MUCH UNCERTAINTY IN THE CURRENT SITUATION, THE SOVIET CLEARLY STATED HIS VIEW THAT THE DECLARATION OF EMERGENCY WAS SERVING INDIA'S INTERESTS AT THIS TIME. IT HAD CALMED DOWN A POLITICALLY OVEREXCITED COUNTRY AND PROVIDED THE OPPORTUNITY FOR THE CONGRESS LEADERSHIP TO END THE STAGNATION AND INERTIA OF RECENT MONTHS. "NOW THE COUNTRY WAS WORKING AGAIN." TO THE SUGGESTION THAT AN EXTENDED EMERGENCY MIGHT ONLY COMPLICATE THE DOMESTIC SITUATION, THE OFFICIAL POINTED TO THE SITUATION IN PAKISTAN WHERE AN EMERGENCY REGIME HAS PREVAILED FOR SOME YEARS. WHILE THE SOVIET OFFICIAL DID NOT RULE OUT A RETURN TO THE PRE-EMERGENCY POLITICAL SITUATION, HE INDICATED THAT HE THOUGHT IT ENTIRELY POSSIBLE THAT SOME BASIC CHANGES MIGHT BE MADE IN INDIA'S DEMOCRACY. HE SAID THAT JUSTICE IYER HAD TOLD HIM THE PREVIOUS EVENING THAT A SUPREME COURT RULING AGAINST MRS GANDHI WAS OT OUT OF THE QUESTION. IF THERE WAS SUCH A RULING, THE SOVIET THOUGHT THAT THE CONGRESS MAJORITY IN THE PARLIAMENT MIGHT BE CALLED UPON TO MAKE SOME CHANGES, AT A MINIMUM IN THE CURRENT ELECTION LAW BARRING THE OFFENDER FROM HOLDING A PARLIAMENTARY SEAT FOR SIX YEARS.

2. THE SOVIET COUNSELOR CONCEDED THAT MRS GANDHI HAD MADE SOME MISTAKES. HE WAS ALSO CRITICAL OF THE NEW ECONOMIC PROGRAM ANNOUNCED JULY 2. IT OFFERED "THE SAME OLD MEASURES" AND INCLUDED NO CALL FOR NATIONALIZATION OF BIG-BUSINESS. HE EXPECTED THE CPI CENTRAL SECRETARIAT TO SIGNAL SOME DISAPPOINTMENT AT THE PROGRAM WHEN ITS CURRENT MEETING IN DELHI CONCLUDED. LAND REFORM AND AN ATTACK ON INDIA'S "KULAKS" WERE ALSO RE-
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QUIRED ACCORDING TO THE OFFICIAL. BUT THE CONGRESS PARTY HAD A PROBLEM: IF IT UNDERMINED THE BIG LANDLORDS IT WOULD BE "CUTTING OFF THE BRANCH ON WHICH IT WAS SITTING." NONETHELESS, CONSIDERING ALL THINGS, THERE WAS "NO ALTERNATIVE" TO MRS. GANDHI. IN THE SOVIET OFFICIAL'S VIEW, ANY CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP WOULD NECESSARILY INVOLVE A SHIFT TO THE RIGHT. THIS WAS WHY THE SOVIET UNION WAS FIRMLY SUPPORING THE PRESENT LEADERSHIP. WHEN THE REPORTING OFFICER SUGGESTED THE

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SOVIETS MIGHT BE CONCERNED THAT ANY NEW GOVERNMENT WOULD OFFER AN OPENING TO THE PRC, THE SOVIET OFFICER SIMPLY REITERATED THAT MRS GANDHI WAS THE "OPTIMAL" LEADER FROM THE USSR'S VIEW.

3. THE SOVIET EMBASSY COUNSELOR FURTHER SAID HE WAS NOT AWARE OF ANY MESSAGE FROM THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP TO THE PRIME MINISTER, SUCH AS PRESIDENT TITO HAD DELIVERED. AMBASSADOR MALTSEV, HE INDICATED, HAD BEEN BRIEFED BY FOREIGN SECRETARY KEWAL SINGH AND HAD ALSO SEEN DEFENSE MINISTER SWARAN SINGH. HE HAD NOT SEEN THE PRIME MINISTER. KEWAL SINGH HAD SPOKEN OF A CONSPIRACY AND HAD VAGUELY REFERRED TO THE ACTIVITIES OF "CERTAIN FOREIGN CIRCLES." WHEN QUREIED AS TO WHAT THIS MIGHT HAVE MEANT THE SOVIET EXPLAINED HE ASSUMED THE INDIANS WERE CONCERNED ABOUT THE CHINESE. ON THE QUESTION OF INDO-US RELATIONS THE SOVIET OFFICIAL THOUGHT THAT MRS GANDHI'S REMARKS JULY 1 THAT PRESIDENT FORD WOULD BE WELCOME TO VISIT INDIA WERE SIGNIFICANT, ESPECIALLY SINCE THEY WERE MADE ON THE EVE OF INDEPENDENCE DAY. ON INDO-SOVIET RELATIONS OVER THE NEAR-TERM, THE SOVIET OFFICIAL FORESAW NOTHING NOTABLE TAKING PLACE. HE DENIED (AS DID AN MEA OFFICER TO US JULY 1) THAT AGRICULTURAL MINISTER RAM WAS REFERRING TO POSSIBLE PUR-CHASES OF SOVIET FOOD GRAIN IN HIS AIR INTERVIEW OF JUNE 27 (NEW DELHI 8594, PARA 6). THE SOVIET VOLUNTEERED THAT THE GOI HAD A PROBLEM IN REPLACING D.P. DHAR AS AMBASSADOR TO MOSCOW. HE THOUGHT THE FORMER DEFENSE SECRETARY GOVIND NARAIN OR LESS POSSIBLY MRS GANDHI'S CURRENT PERSONAL SECRETARY P.N. DHAR WERE THE LEADING CANDIDATES.
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